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Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico)

later: Mr. KHAN (Pakistan)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (A/51/3 (Parts I and II), A/51/38, 90, 180, 210, 277 and Corr.1, 304, 309, 325 and 391)

AGENDA ITEM 104: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (A/51/90, 210 and 322)

1. Ms. GREEN (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues) said that, following the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the Secretary-General had designated her as his Special Adviser on Gender Issues, with the responsibility of chairing the Steering Committee on the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat. The purpose was to ensure that the gender perspective was integrated into the policies and programmes of the United Nations system, and also to enable the Secretary-General to be in closer and more frequent contact with the Steering Committee.

2. The Secretary-General had firmly reiterated his commitment to gender equality in the United Nations, vigorously pursuing the idea of setting specific numerical targets culminating in total parity by the year 2000.

3. That goal now seemed more difficult to attain, owing in part to the current financial crisis. The Secretary-General was, however, determined to pursue the targets, and several special measures had been taken to comply with the commitments undertaken, and to ensure that women were not disproportionately affected by the crisis. The question of gender sensitization had acquired a new priority both at Headquarters and in the field. The Secretary-General was also promoting the establishment of a roster of highly-qualified women who could become his special representatives or heads of mission. More women were being hired in the field and had assumed responsibilities in areas covered by peace-related missions.

4. By taking a firm public stand on the standards that guided the work of the United Nations with regard to the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, the Secretary-General had assumed a leading role in restating the question of gender equality in a particularly delicate situation, making it clear that the United Nations system would continue to abide by internationally accepted legal instruments while respecting donor or recipient requirements which did not conflict with those principles. The United Nations had thus reaffirmed its commitment to human rights and to the underlying legal framework. It also stressed that women's rights were human rights.

5. The policy of incorporating more women in conditions of equality in the Secretariat was crucial in providing the United Nations with both the moral authority and the credibility it needed to promote the advancement of women throughout the world.

6. The Secretary-General's determination to comply with the mandate entrusted to him required the continuous support of the Member States. He would continue to look for ways to consolidate a working environment in the Secretariat where

women and men were given equal opportunities and incentives to develop their careers.

7. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) introduced the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/51/304), submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 50/164.

8. The Secretariat had achieved one of the goals set by the General Assembly: the overall representation of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had stood at 35.2 per cent at the end of August 1996. That had been accomplished at a time of financial and budgetary constraints and an overall recruitment freeze. The Secretary-General had repeatedly reiterated his commitment to achieving gender equality in the Secretariat and that commitment had been actively pursued by the Focal Point for Women and the Office of Human Resources Management team. In January 1996, the Secretary-General had issued a bulletin to remind all senior managers to achieve gender equality in the United Nations, and an administrative instruction (ST/AI/412) had consolidated the special measures previously issued. The aim of those measures was to provide women with enhanced opportunities for promotion and placement until gender equality was achieved.

9. Two special measures had proven to be particularly effective. One allowed women who had served the Organization for at least one year under any type of appointment to be considered internal candidates and to apply as such for vacancies in the global United Nations Secretariat. The second, that of cumulative seniority, recognized the need to increase the pool of women eligible for promotion to policy- and decision-making levels.

10. The statistics contained in the report showed that real progress had been achieved for women at the junior Professional levels. Improvements were also being made in the middle ranks; however, there was still a need to create a critical mass of women staff at the P-4 and P-5 levels in order to form a pool of women candidates for senior posts. Three departments had already met the General Assembly's 50/50 gender goal. However, the General Assembly target of 25 per cent of women in the senior decision-making levels had not been achieved. As of 31 August 1996, the percentage of women at the D-1 level and above had been only 17.9 per cent. Greater efforts were needed to give well-qualified women access to the more senior posts.

11. While it was important to reach mandated targets, there must also be nurturing and mentoring for young entrants and for middle-level women staff already on board. That included building a work environment that was conducive to attracting the best and the brightest and retaining them. It was equally important to ensure that women were visible and participated in all areas of work of the United Nations.

12. Traditionally, there were certain areas such as languages, administration and support services where a higher representation of women was found; in the political areas, however, there were far fewer. It was not enough to look at numbers alone; women must be given opportunities for leadership, to chair meetings, lead missions and be involved in political negotiations.

13. Only when genuine equality was achieved in the global Secretariat could the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in United Nations activities be assured. Those criteria should also be taken into account in the Organization's work with consultants and contractors. Senior management must recognize that women brought a unique and special perspective to decision-making and policy-setting. Decisions and policies made without women's perspective would be lacking something essential. Work was under way to bring about a culture change which would include a better understanding of the mix of human resources available to the Organization and the importance of having all, men and women, contribute to their maximum potential.

14. The 300 most senior staff members, including heads of department, had been sensitized to gender and diversity issues in the United Nations workplace. More gender-sensitivity training was needed for all managers. However, the recruitment freeze had taken away one of the main tools for improving the percentage of women in the Professional category, especially at the most senior levels.

15. Policies were in place to provide a work environment that was receptive to the needs of all staff. However, in day-to-day management, limited funds and the need to balance priorities had meant that those policies had not been fully implemented. The working environment must be family oriented, and conditions of service must allow women in all categories to manage not only their working careers and personal growth, but also their family responsibilities.

16. The Office of Human Resources Management had been networking closely with colleagues in other agencies and programmes to learn from their experience. There were also plans to set up a regular dialogue with staff members, not only within the system but also in other regional, national and international organizations, who would discuss issues of mutual concern, exchange ideas, and provide each other with information on vacancies and names of potential women candidates for senior positions. A quarterly newsletter had recently been published for the first time, providing women within the United Nations with a forum for discussion and information on gender issues as well as details of administrative directives, vacancy announcements, and other matters of concern to women. The Office of the Focal Point for Women required reinforcement in order to monitor the implementation and progress of the strategic plan of action. Although General Assembly resolution 49/222 had urged Member States to make voluntary contributions to that end, none had so far been received.

17. There was a genuine desire to bring about gender parity in the Organization, but until that was achieved, efforts must be made to give the same weight to gender balance as to geographical representation. The responsibility for that lay with both the Organization and the Member States. It was necessary to compensate for past neglect. The downsizing of the Secretariat and tight constraints on recruitment made the task doubly difficult. With the approach of the next century, close cooperation was needed to bring to the Organization the full potential and creativity of women for the formulation and implementation of policies for the future.

18. Mrs. KING (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the issues before the Committee were all about implementation of the agreements

reached at the Beijing Conference. The Assembly was now in a position to review the functioning of the three-tiered intergovernmental structure it had set in place the previous year, as well as implementation by the organizations of the United Nations system. It had before it the Secretary-General's report on implementing the outcome of the Conference (A/51/322).

19. The first tier of the intergovernmental structure consisted of the Commission on the Status of Women, which had adopted a long-term programme of work. The second tier was the Economic and Social Council, which was currently considering when it would take up the issue of the advancement of women at its high-level, coordination and operational segments. The third tier was the General Assembly.

20. The ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality had held its first meeting on the previous day. That Committee constituted a regular mechanism for consultation and collaboration on policies and programmes, and was intended to ensure mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system.

21. The Beijing Platform for Action assigned primary responsibility for implementation to Governments, which were proceeding, in consultation with non-governmental organizations, to implement their commitments. The General Assembly at its previous session had emphasized that Governments should develop comprehensive implementation strategies or plans of action no later than the end of 1996. The Commission had requested the Division for the Advancement of Women to prepare a synthesized report on implementation plans of Governments and the United Nations system. Pursuant to that request, the Division had so far received 19 national action plans from Governments. A subregional conference of governmental experts, held in Bucharest in September 1996, had recommended that a model national action plan should be used as a reference in developing specific plans in each country. Making those plans available to the Division would enable it to prepare an analysis for the 1998 session of the Commission.

22. A key aspect of addressing women's human rights was the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At their ninth meeting, the States parties to the Convention had recommended to the Assembly that it should approve that Committee's request for an additional session each year, as a temporary measure.

23. The critical area of violence against women was addressed in two reports: one on traffic in women and girls (A/51/309) and one on violence against women migrant workers (A/51/325). The latter included the conclusions and recommendations of the expert group meeting held at Manila in May 1996.

24. At its 1997 session, the Commission would consider four areas: women in power and decision-making; women in the economy; women and the environment; and women and education and training.

25. The Beijing Conference had proved that the momentum generated by ideas could be a powerful force for change. The challenge to the international community was to maintain that momentum by its actions; it must keep its eyes on the prize, keep its faith in the outcome and do what needed to be done.

26. Ms. HEYZER (Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women) said she was proud to report that the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was involved in helping women in their quest for economic and political empowerment. In that climb to equality, women were well on their way to the summit and there was no turning back. The question was not whether they would reach the summit, but when.

27. One year after the Beijing Conference, significant advances had been made. The Platform for Action was serving as a strong foundation for women and their Governments to press forward and integrate gender issues into planning and practice.

28. In its work to facilitate implementation of the Platform for Action, UNIFEM was using five strategies: strengthening the capacity of women's organizations and networks to advocate for women; supporting innovative programmes and projects benefiting women; leveraging funds and support for innovative strategies dealing with critical issues affecting women; acting as a catalyst within the United Nations system and at the regional and national levels to advance women's empowerment; and documenting and disseminating best practices and lessons learned.

29. Current UNIFEM activities included helping to mobilize support for home-based workers in Asia; helping women in Latin America to start and run small businesses by guaranteeing loans made by local banks; training South African women in business and leadership skills using South-South peer training and identifying high-profit businesses; providing gender-sensitive workshops for male and female judges and police in several Latin American countries on issues related to family violence and violence against women; training in gender-sensitive development for parliamentarians in the Pacific Islands and other countries; promoting reforms in parts of Africa for the protection of refugee and internally-displaced women and training women in sustainable livelihoods and techniques; working with a national women's movement in Brazil to advocate changes in laws to implement agreements reached in Beijing; funding an initiative in Chile to draft a post-Beijing analysis of rural and indigenous women's needs; and supporting priority-setting and implementation activities between Governments, non-governmental organizations and donors in Kenya and in Jordan.

30. UNIFEM was helping more than 16 Governments to transform the Platform for Action into national action plans, and it was increasingly becoming a resource on women's empowerment within the United Nations system, acting as a gender adviser to the United Nations resident coordinator system, and chairing inter-agency task forces on gender and development in several countries. UNIFEM was also collaborating with the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

31. From the grass-roots to the global Internet, from village councils to national Governments, from local banks to world trade, women were reaching new levels of participation and partnership with men. They were truly climbing to equality. Women faced many barriers in their fight to achieve economic and

political empowerment. With the support and encouragement of the international community, however, women would reach that summit of equality.

32. Mr. HOEY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and also Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had established a framework for the empowerment of women and for mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international level. The commitments undertaken required strong political determination to ensure prompt and full implementation. Governments could not argue that religious or ethical values, cultural background or philosophical convictions prevented them from carrying out those commitments. The member States of the European Union reaffirmed their commitment to the Declaration and Platform for Action and called on Governments to develop comprehensive strategies to achieve equality between women and men and mainstream a gender perspective in all social, economic, civil, political and cultural fields. Governments should inform the international community and, in particular, the Division for the Advancement of Women about progress made.

33. In view of the important role played by non-governmental organizations, their participation in the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action was crucial. Governments should enhance the involvement of all actors in society in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Implementation of the Platform required a political commitment to make resources available at the national and international levels for the empowerment of women. The gender perspective must be integrated into budgetary decisions; and specific programmes ensuring equality between women and men must be adequately financed.

34. The European Union was contributing to the implementation of the Beijing commitments, inter alia, through a community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men. In October 1995, the Union had adopted a resolution aimed at promoting a realistic picture of the potential of women and men in society. A new directive guaranteed workers a minimum of three months' unpaid parental leave, distinct from maternity leave, when a child was born or adopted. The European Union was committed to integrating gender issues into development in order to change attitudes and structures at all levels and reduce gender inequalities in sharing power and in access to development opportunities. The Council of Ministers regularly reviewed the Union's implementation of the Beijing commitments.

35. The follow-up to the Beijing Conference on Women required an integrated approach to the advancement of women and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system. He welcomed the action taken by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council to implement General Assembly resolution 50/203 and commended the work in mainstreaming a gender perspective in poverty plans and strategies. The Commission should continue reviewing the Platform's priority areas of concern in its consideration of education, the training of women, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, and women and the environment.

36. The proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 should be the basis for action by the United Nations system in

implementing the outcome of the Beijing Conference. The European Union also underlined the need to review and assess in the year 2000 the progress achieved in implementing the Platform in an appropriate forum. The ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality should focus on the practical requirements of mainstreaming, monitor progress and coordinate implementation of the Platform for Action, and keep the Commission on the Status of Women informed of its work. Gender analysis based on reliable up-to-date data was an essential tool in understanding the full impact of policies. A gender perspective must be integrated into all aspects of the design and execution of programmes to combat poverty.

37. The Division for the Advancement of Women and other parts of the United Nations system should further develop the conceptual basis for the system-wide mainstreaming of a gender perspective as part of the preparations for the proposed discussion on mainstreaming at the 1997 session of the Economic and Social Council. In that regard, the input of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality would be of great value.

38. The Union stressed the importance of ensuring adequate financial resources for all United Nations policies and programmes in the system-wide follow-up to the Beijing Conference. In that regard, he welcomed the decision to approve an increase in the staffing level of the Division for the Advancement of Women to enable it to carry out all its tasks under the Platform for Action. It was hoped that the Division could be brought up to full strength as a matter of priority, in spite of financial constraints.

39. Under Article 8 of the Charter, women and men should be entitled to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in all United Nations organs. Full implementation of that provision was essential if the Organization was to retain its credibility and leadership role as an advocate for improving the status of women worldwide. While welcoming the progress made in filling professional posts with women, the overall figure concealed great variations among departments and offices. The proportion of women at policy- and decision-making levels was disappointing.

40. The European Union was concerned that the current financial constraints had had an adverse impact on the advancement of women in the Secretariat, both in terms of recruitment and promotion, and reaffirmed the need to meet the 50/50 target. The Union welcomed the steps being taken by the Secretary-General to mitigate the impact of current budgetary constraints and called on him to take the necessary measures to achieve the targets established. The European Union would welcome efforts to appoint women as special representatives and to fill other high-level positions as well as steps to involve women in vital areas of United Nations work, such as peacekeeping operations. Governments should try to appoint more women to represent them in the various United Nations bodies and should nominate more women as candidates for election to expert groups.

41. The European Union called on all States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in order to bring about universal ratification by the year 2000. The Union continued to be concerned that a number of States had made reservations that were incompatible with the purpose of the Convention. Since

such reservations cast doubt on the commitment of the States concerned and undermined international law, those States should withdraw them as a matter of priority.

42. He welcomed the decision by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to amend its reporting guidelines and invite States parties to take into account the critical areas of concern in their reports. The Committee would thus perform a valuable monitoring function. Steps should be taken to improve the Committee's working methods to eliminate the backlog of reports for consideration. Enabling the Committee to meet for two three-week sessions annually would help significantly. He welcomed the ongoing work on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the right of petition, and urged Member States to take an active part in the open-ended Working Group of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Union insisted that conference services should be made available to that end.

43. The European Union considered that the Third Committee should in future consider the issues of the advancement of women and the follow-up to the Beijing Conference under a single agenda item, and strongly favoured the adoption of a single resolution covering all aspects of the question.

44. Mrs. MORGAN (Mexico) said that her Government had established a national programme for women, 1995-2000, in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The programme sought to coordinate governmental action to promote the advancement of women and recognized the role to be played by non-governmental organizations. A coordination committee had been established for implementing the programme. All bodies of the executive branch had to draw up work plans for increasing the participation of women in development and ensuring complete equality with men. Strategies and guidelines were being established in various priority areas to implement a social policy with a gender perspective.

45. She noted with satisfaction the results of the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Following endorsement by the Economic and Social Council, the Commission's mandate had been strengthened and a multi-year programme had been established for following up the implementation of the Platform for Action. The United Nations should closely coordinate the activities of all its bodies and specialized agencies in order to achieve that objective. The efforts made to mainstream a gender perspective in each of the agencies had been significant. The establishment of inter-agency task forces for monitoring international conferences was an essential mechanism for attaining that goal.

46. She also reiterated her country's strong condemnation of violence against women migrant workers and trafficking in women and children, and underscored the need to eradicate them.

47. Mr. KASANDA (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the 12 member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), commended the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for amending its reporting guidelines, which should enable the Committee to monitor the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed under the Convention. He urged States parties to support that important initiative by taking into account the critical areas of concern when

submitting reports to the Committee. SADC firmly supported that Committee's request for adequate meeting time in order to reduce its increasing backlog of reports by States parties. He noted with satisfaction the Economic and Social Council's decision to renew the mandate of the open-ended Working Group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the right of petition.

48. The current financial crisis should not affect the advancement of women in the Secretariat; all efforts should still be made to achieve the 50-per-cent target of women in all posts. He agreed, however, with the view that the United Nations system could not do more than reflect the world community. Until women participated in sufficient numbers in all areas and in decision-making positions at the national level, the efforts of organizations to bring about a more equitable representation in their secretariats would not succeed. In that regard, the SADC member States expressed their concern that women from Africa were under-represented in the United Nations system.

49. Women throughout the world had made great strides in their advancement. In the past year, African women had made an important contribution in promoting peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Such examples showed that the time had come for the Secretary-General to appoint at least one woman as a special envoy in a United Nations peace initiative.

50. With regard to the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, he stressed the need for a practical, commonsense approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes. An identifiable focal point was needed within the United nations system to coordinate gender issues. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action should have a high profile in order to maintain political interest and commitment and ensure accountability for performance. That was why the establishment of a special high-level post had been recommended. It was unfortunate that a different arrangement had been put in place. The SADC member States accepted that arrangement with very strong reservations and felt that the situation should be reviewed as soon as circumstances were favourable. The current arrangement was an inadequate response to the aspirations of the Beijing Conference.

51. SADC welcomed the establishment of the ACC Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. It was unclear whether the Inter-agency Committee would be serviced by the Division for the Advancement of Women. The tasks assigned to that Committee required adequate and stable servicing.

52. SADC looked forward to a comprehensive report on the review of the implementation of the Platform for Action by United Nations institutions. In the meantime, however, there was an urgent need to strengthen operational activities. There should be better coordination of policy formulation and implementation through programme delivery. Policies must be translated into concrete, achievable programmes. As part of that exercise, there should be a review of the reporting procedures of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which should submit a regular report to the Third Committee.

53. Immediately after the Beijing Conference, SADC had held a subregional meeting to initiate implementation of the Platform for Action. A subregional plan of action on women and development was currently being finalized. A decision had been made to use the SADC tribunal to consider violations of women's rights; and steps were being taken to incorporate the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into SADC instruments and protocols. He underscored the need to ensure the enjoyment of women's human rights; that included access to credit and ownership of land, and action to alleviate poverty among women and prevent violence against them.

54. Mrs. SUGIMORI (Japan) said that the Platform for Action could most effectively be implemented if policies developed by the Commission on the Status of Women and other intergovernmental bodies were transmitted to the operational organs of the United Nations system and other international organizations to be used as guidelines. A system-wide and integrated approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective within operational activities at all levels was also required. It was important to link policy-making intergovernmental bodies with funds and programmes, and her country therefore looked forward to effective coordination through the working group on operational activities.

55. Her country was pleased that UNIFEM had been able, with the help of the extraordinary contributions it had received from donors and the stringent budget it had introduced, to recover from the severe financial crisis that had beset it in 1995. She also welcomed the completion of the external evaluation of UNIFEM. Her Government supported all the activities of UNIFEM aimed at eliminating violence against women. Accordingly, it welcomed the establishment of the Trust Fund, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/166. Japan intended to contribute $1 million to it in 1996, and hoped that other countries would also contribute.

56. Her country had noted the decision of the Administrator of UNDP to increase the funds devoted to global and regional programmes targeting women, and to recruit gender advisers to oversee regional programmes. UNIFEM would have an important role to play in building the capacity of the UNDP focal point on gender. In its official development assistance, Japan gave high priority to women in development, and would pursue that initiative, prioritizing education, health, and economic and social participation. It also supported women in development-related projects through bilateral and multilateral channels. Her country had undertaken a number of measures designed to implement the Platform for Action, including the formulation of a new national plan of action, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/203.

57. Her country had made a commitment to build upon the partnership between men and women and between the Government and civil society. To that end it had hosted a meeting of senior officials from East and South-East Asian countries and, at the national level, had established a liaison conference for the promotion of gender equality as a channel for communication between the Government and the public. Local governments and non-governmental organizations had undertaken campaigns to raise public awareness and disseminate information on the Beijing Conference. Since 1957, the Government had included representatives of women's non-governmental organizations in its delegations to the General Assembly.

58. Ms. STOLTENBERG (Norway) said her delegation agreed with the strong wording used by the Secretary-General in his report on the status of women in the Secretariat (A/51/304). The crux of the issue was the added value of a more gender-balanced staff at all levels, since women added new insights and were an important and under-utilized resource. It was disappointing that the report suggested the setting of "more realistic targets", in other words, a downscaling of the proportion of women staff. If targets were hard to reach, the answer was to try even harder, using quotas if necessary. It was crucial to have women on all appointment committees, since their eye for relevant talent and experience differed from that of men. It was not clear why the financial crisis should make targets harder to reach, since the restructuring provided new opportunities and greater flexibility.

59. The problem of trafficking in and sexual exploitation of women and children was growing, and no longer mainly concerned exploited women from third-world countries. It had spread to large parts of Europe, where the victims tended to be women from the countries in transition, and where trafficking was to a large extent controlled by organized international crime syndicates. The Platform for Action had called for programmes such as those initiated by many European regional organizations in order to combat trafficking and to assist victims. Such programmes required international cooperation, and she welcomed the valuable work done at the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996.

60. Her delegation strongly supported efforts to strengthen the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The current situation was demoralizing, and unless changed, it would take six years for the Committee to examine the existing backlog of national reports, by which time they would be hopelessly out of date.

61. The Platform for Action had called for the mainstreaming of the human rights of women into the general human rights machinery of the United Nations, and that process should be accelerated. It would be advantageous to establish close links between the groups working in New York and Geneva, in order to avoid overlapping instruments and an unclear distribution of responsibility, and avoid giving the impression that all women's human rights issues belonged in that Committee. From a practical point of view, the scarce resources of all the three relevant bodies - the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Commission on Human Rights - called for better coordination and use of their expertise.

62. Ms. PIERROT-BULTS (Netherlands) said that, since there was apparently no country in the world in which women's power or economic status equalled that of men, the United Nations could not be expected to work miracles. However, it was still duty-bound to do everything in its power to further gender equality inside and outside the Organization. It was of the utmost importance to women that the United Nations was able to fulfil all its responsibilities, but that was only possible if Member States paid their contributions. Member States should also demonstrate the importance they attached to gender equality by making available the resources to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

63. System-wide mainstreaming was a valuable instrument for raising awareness of gender perspectives and eradicating inequality in the United Nations system. The appointment of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues was a step forward. System-wide gender-specific knowledge was also increased by the work with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. Her delegation strongly recommended that the Special Rapporteur's mandate should be extended, since violence against women was such a widespread phenomenon that the subject should be integrated into the mandates of other special and thematic rapporteurs. Their activities should be well-coordinated to ensure that violence against women was combated across the board. Better coordination with regard to the integration of gender perspectives in all United Nations programmes would increase general efficiency and enhance programmes for the advancement of women. A strong, effective Commission on the Status of Women was needed to monitor and sustain that process.

64. Turning to the Commission's special themes for 1996 - poverty, women and the media, and child and dependant care - she said that education was the first priority if women were to achieve economic independence. Women should be involved at all levels and at all stages of the planning and implementation of programmes. Child labour also had a long-term impact by impeding eduction. Progress was being made in assessing gender-specific effects, but they needed to be systematically measured.

65. Although the victims of armed conflicts were often women and children, aid programmes were not gender specific, and ignored the particular problems faced by women, such as violence of all kinds, including sexual violence. Furthermore, high government expenditure on arms reduced the resources available for education and health care, and helped to perpetuate poverty.

66. If women were to achieve economic independence, as well as an equal share of power and resources, it was vital that stereotypical images of women should be abandoned. The media played an important role in conveying an image of women to the general public, and UNESCO could give guidance on that matter.

67. There was a highly unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. Both legislation and the changing of traditional role models and stereotypes could affect the economic situation of women and ensure greater equality in decision-making and a more balanced division of responsibilities. While relevant laws often existed, practice was too often still in accordance with traditional patterns and values. Traditions and religious customs were highly valued, but there was no excuse for violations of women's rights. Trade unions could play a role in negotiating family-friendly terms of employment. Long-term strategies must be used to combat stereotyped role perceptions, since any change in mentality came slowly. Educational programmes aimed at both sexes and all age groups should be developed to make it clear that caring was not solely the task of women. Increased participation by men in family responsibilities had a positive effect on children, and good educational programmes for boys and increased care tasks for men helped to reduce domestic violence.

68. The Netherlands supported the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the right of petition, and hoped that the Working Group on that issue would be able to finalize its work before the Economic and Social Council met in 1997.

69. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would depend on Governments taking action to provide the necessary legislation and resources. Educating and empowering women would empower future generations and gradually reduce poverty throughout the world. Non-governmental organizations had a major role to play in setting the agenda, assisting in the implementation of programmes concerned with women's priorities, and in monitoring and evaluating the results. The involvement of both women and men was necessary, and cooperation between them was essential for the success of activities for the advancement of women.

70. Mrs. TAN Yee Kew (Malaysia) said that successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action depended on political will and on workable national strategies being adopted by Governments. Her country was fully committed to implementation of the Platform, which had been incorporated into development plans, and had had encouraging success in promoting women's advancement in various sectors over the last decade. Malaysian women had equal access to education, and at tertiary level, where females represented 45 per cent of those enrolled, there had been a significant increase in the professional and technical fields. Women represented about 47 per cent of the workforce, and although still under-represented at professional and managerial levels, changes in favour of women were expected in the near future, since increased numbers of qualified women entered the job market every year. Owing to the rapidly expanding economy, there were increased opportunities and ample room for upward mobility.

71. The Government had addressed the problem of poverty among women through various policies and programmes. Economic and social indicators proved the strides made by women in a number of economic activities. It was gratifying to note that a similar improvement in the economic status of women was taking place in other developing countries experiencing economic growth. The issue of women and poverty could not be addressed in isolation from the wider economic environment. Where poverty and unemployment were rampant, it was unrealistic to create pockets of economically advanced women through catalytic economic programmes for women. Unless such programmes formed a part of integrated economic development, they would be unsustainable and have no chain effect on the rest of the female population.

72. Her delegation condemned the violation of women's rights committed during armed conflict, such as those which had taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and fully supported United Nations resolutions to regard rape during armed conflict as a war crime. The slow progress in bringing the perpetrators of such crimes to justice was regrettable, and immediate measures should be taken to ensure that they were severely dealt with. On the national level, Malaysia's Domestic Violence Act of 1994 offered protection to both spouses and children against abuse.

73. Her delegation was deeply concerned by the increase in the number of incidents relating to the international trafficking of women, and had co-sponsored United Nations resolution 50/167 on traffic in women and girls. It urged the relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to be more active in addressing that issue. The problem would only be eliminated with the participation of the international community at all levels.

74. Her delegation took the opportunity to commend the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women for its relentless efforts to promote and upgrade the status and well-being of women, and for continuing to develop strategies and programmes for the advancement of women worldwide.

75. Mrs. KABA CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, although the African States were committed to the advancement of women, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was hampered by lack of resources. Official development assistance had fallen sharply, with only a handful of donor countries honouring their previous commitment. At the same time, the African States faced mounting foreign debt.

76. The successes of the United Nations bodies dealing with gender issues had been accomplished against a background of budgetary restrictions and downsizing. Some valuable contributions to the empowerment of women and their integration in development had been made. Women's concerns must, however, be accorded greater attention when development policies and programmes were formulated. There was a need to compile disaggregated statistics reflecting the proportion of spending on development allocated to projects for women. That task could be entrusted to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

77. There had been a marked improvement in the status of women in the Secretariat, though they were still under-represented at the decision-making level. All attempts to redress the gender balance must take into account the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Women working within the Organization must be enabled to reconcile the demands of professional and family life. Measures to deal with sexual harassment must also be adopted.

78. The Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322) gave a comprehensive account of system-wide efforts to mainstream the gender perspective. There was a need, however, to give a clearer picture of the work of the different agencies and programmes, and in particular of the regional commissions, so that their achievements in that area could be compared side by side, perhaps by means of a table. She supported the proposal by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that the reports of States parties should set out their action in the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. With regard to her own region, she called upon the Economic Commission for Africa to take greater account of the concerns of women and of their role in development.

79. Ms. TOMOVÁ (Slovakia) said that her Government, demonstrating its commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, had set up a coordinating committee for women's issues. The committee

was currently examining key areas of concern, including legislation, social policy and employment. In addition, a project entitled "Slovak women on the move" had been launched in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The goals of the project were to raise public awareness of the outcome of the Beijing Conference, to shape perceptions of the status of women and to gather information concerning the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action. The research conducted to date on the status of women in Slovak society had shown that many men were unwilling to accept women's equality in the family and, given the current state of the labour market, they were prepared to tolerate discrimination against women in the workplace. Women themselves, influenced by existing stereotypes, considered that they were ill-suited to management roles. The project was therefore aimed at changing the portrayal of women in the mass media.

80. The Beijing Platform had highlighted the problems of rural women. Some 44 per cent of Slovak women lived in the countryside. The recent agricultural reforms had resulted in the worsening of their condition. Many worked for little or no pay. Those wishing to set up their own enterprises had little access to training or support. Her Government had recently organized a workshop to examine the problems of rural women. Her delegation appreciated the opportunity afforded it at the meetings of the various United Nations bodies dealing with gender issues to meet with representatives from all over the world and exchange information and ideas on the situation of women in their respective countries. Such contacts could only serve to deepen international cooperation.

81. Mr. KA (Senegal) said that the treatment of women as second-class citizens was gradually being changed, but much remained to be done. With regard to the status of women in the Secretariat, he had been pleased to note from the Secretary-General's report (A/51/304, para. 9) that the special measures stipulated in administrative instruction ST/AI/412 of 5 January 1996 had yielded a promotion rate of 41.3 per cent for women during the previous year. The appointment of a Special Adviser on Gender Issues bore witness to the importance accorded to the problem of discrimination against women in the workplace. The recent creation by the Secretary-General of the Steering Committee on the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat was another step in the right direction. The Organization must ensure that the current financial crisis did not slow the process of women's advancement. Currently, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution overall by the year 2000 appeared illusive.

82. The advancement of women was one of his Government's priorities. Education and training were central to its strategy. Currently, 50 per cent of those in full-time education were girls, a notable achievement given the limited means available. The adoption of a national plan of action for women outlining specific measures aimed at improving the status of women in the period 1997 to 2001 testified to his Government's commitment. As the next millennium approached, all States must ensure that society benefited fully from the contribution women could make.

83. Ms. REGAZZOLI (Argentina) said that the Beijing Conference on women had reaffirmed the relationship between the advancement of women and the progress of society as a whole. The commitments undertaken in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must be translated into reality urgently; women would be the

chief victims of any delay, for they were the group most severely affected by the aggravation of poverty and continuing illiteracy. The education of women was the key to attaining the objectives of the Beijing Conference and to improving women's role in the economy, their health and their quality of life. Governments must introduce the gender perspective in their policies and programmes. Follow-up to the Beijing Conference must be coordinated with the outcomes of the other major international conferences in the fields of population, the environment, social development, human settlements, food and human rights.

84. The world was currently at a turning point which would have global consequences and was characterized by a great degree of uncertainty. New meaning must therefore be given to the word "solidarity" and funds must be mobilized from new sources, including the private sector, development institutions and bilateral donors.

85. Her delegation was profoundly grateful to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for its hard work. Argentina strongly supported the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the right of petition. In the forty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women it would work to finalize a draft text. Argentina had recently submitted its updated third periodic report on the status of women.

86. At the national level, Argentina had established an ad hoc commission for follow-up to the Beijing Conference, over which she presided. The commission selected priority activities in the different regions of Argentina, according to their needs, within the framework of the Beijing Platform, on both an emergency and a long-term basis. With the support of the mass media, Argentina had disseminated the results of the Beijing Conference and the commitments undertaken by the Government to follow it up. The country had also witnessed a qualitative leap in the political life of women with the implementation of the Act on Quotas. Women legislators now constituted nearly one third of the National Congress.

87. The issue of violence against women must continue to be addressed urgently. In the past 10 years, the legitimacy of violence against Argentine women had been undermined. Legislation must not be confined to the most blatant forms of mistreatment, but must also cover less visible forms of violence, including economic and political violence, violence in the workplace and sexual exploitation. She welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on traffic in women and girls (A/51/309) and urged the international community to take all necessary measures to eradicate that phenomenon. The problems of forced prostitution, rape, sexual abuse and sex tourism must also be dealt with.

88. The draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children and child prostitution and child pornography must be elaborated urgently. In that connection, her delegation strongly supported the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996. Argentina also welcomed the work being undertaken within the United Nations system on measures to combat traffic in women and girls. Greater public

awareness would help to facilitate government-sponsored action to eradicate such crimes.

89. Mr. Khan (Pakistan), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

90. Mrs. DUEÑAS LOZA (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)) said that the mandate assigned to INSTRAW upon its establishment in 1976 required a multidisciplinary and holistic approach. Differences of opinion regarding the best solutions to women's issues were an integral part of research in that they generated creative thinking and challenged preconceived notions. Some had questioned the value of the research conducted by INSTRAW, arguing that women's issues were peripheral. It was now broadly understood, however, that those same issues were interlinked with the fundamental questions of sustainable development, quality of life and peace-building. Since its inception, INSTRAW had brought about an evolution in the understanding of the obstacles to women's advancement.

91. Inter-agency coordination was a topic of much debate among Member States. It was vital that the various bodies of the United Nations system should integrate the results of the research carried out by INSTRAW into their own projects. In the short time since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, modest progress had been made in that regard.

92. The proposed merger between INSTRAW and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) had cast a shadow over the former. The ensuing climate of uncertainty had resulted in a loss of credibility, the dwindling of contributions and a reduction in programme capacity. To modernize and improve an institution against such a background was a superhuman task. The Board of Trustees had recently expressed the hope that it would be possible to return the levels of financial and institutional support for INSTRAW to those achieved four years previously.

93. Despite the difficulties it faced, INSTRAW had been able to accomplish many of the tasks set out in its programme of work, and the Institute's Trust Fund remained in credit. The results of the recent external audit had been satisfactory. She had drawn up a more realistic programme of work for the 1996-1997 biennium, taking into account the Institute's reduced operative capacity.

94. She had attempted to establish a relationship of trust with her staff based on equity, transparency and good communication. INSTRAW was ready to embark with enthusiasm upon a new stage in its institutional life, but it could not continue to rely upon the hard work of a few committed individuals. Member States must demonstrate their commitment to INSTRAW by providing a level of financial support commensurate with the tasks entrusted to it.

95. Mrs. SIBAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO had participated in the Beijing Conference, for which it had prepared, in cooperation with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a manifesto entitled "Towards a gender-inclusive culture through education" (A/51/277, paras. 6-9). UNESCO was committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Among the 12 critical areas of concern, a number clearly related to the

UNESCO fields of action. Ten special projects to help empower women had been initiated with a budget of some $10 million.

96. Since both Africa and women were among the top priorities of UNESCO, the Director-General had invited three prominent African women, and through them, their respective networks, to monitor UNESCO activities in the region on an experimental basis in the hope of responding better to women's expectations. UNESCO aimed to ensure that all African girls and women had access to education; to promote better communication among African women by developing community radio and Internet links; to support African women scientists, particularly those involved in water and solar-energy projects; and to enhance the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution. Such projects testified to UNESCO's commitment to the advancement of women.

97. Ms. CORTI (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) drew attention to decision 15/I, adopted by CEDAW at its fifteenth session, expressing appreciation for General Assembly resolution 50/202 which granted an extension of the length of its sessions. CEDAW hoped that the Assembly would also authorize it, on an interim basis, to hold at least two three-week sessions annually, each preceded by a session of the working group, with a view to reducing its backlog of States parties' reports to review.

98. CEDAW, at its fourteenth session, had agreed on elements for an optional protocol to the Convention. An optional protocol had also been recommended by the Vienna Conference on Human Rights and the Beijing Conference on women. At its fortieth session, the Commission on the Status of Women, entrusted with the task of elaborating an optional protocol, had requested the Economic and Social Council to renew the mandate of its Working Group. She hoped that the Third Committee would authorize the continuation of the Working Group in order to enable it to draft the protocol, which would enhance the legal significance of the Convention.

99. CEDAW, at its fifteenth session, had discussed follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and its own role in monitoring the implementation of the Platform. States parties to the Convention had been invited to include information on the implementation of the Platform for Action in the periodic reports beginning in September 1996.

100. Difficulties currently confronting CEDAW included not only the backlog of 44 reports to be considered but also the fact that only five of the scheduled eight reports of States parties had been submitted for the January 1997 session. It was not certain that the Division for the Advancement of Women would be able to find States parties willing to replace those which had been unable to fulfil their obligations. Moreover, 52 initial reports, 44 second periodic reports, 55 third periodic reports and 42 fourth periodic reports were overdue. She appealed to the Committee to remind States parties of their obligations.

101. The Convention and the work of CEDAW must be more widely disseminated at a time when the major themes of the women's movement - equality, development and peace, including the elimination of violence against women - had undergone significant changes. It was thus imperative that the General Assembly should

also approve the two three-week sessions preceded by a one-week session of the working group until the amendment of article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention, entered into force. Recent world conferences had reaffirmed that women's rights were human rights and that all human rights were universal, interdependent and indivisible. All those conferences had recognized the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as the basic legal framework for the human rights of women. The Beijing Conference had also recognized the crucial role of CEDAW in guaranteeing those rights. The Committee needed the support of the General Assembly and of the entire United Nations system in order to continue its work.

102. General recommendation 19 of CEDAW formed the basis for the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Violence against women in all its forms was spreading; recent political developments had illustrated that women were still a vulnerable group. CEDAW was concerned with the issues of prostitution as a new kind of slavery and trafficking in women, and one of its members had participated in the expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, held in Manila in May 1996. It was deeply disturbed by the executions, disappearances, and other violations of women's rights in certain countries.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.